

The Georgetown Market
3276 M Street, N.W.
Georgetown
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-123

HABS
DC
GEO
82-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Washington Planning and Service Center
1730 North Lynn Street
Arlington, Virginia

THE GEORGETOWN MARKET

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Location: 3276 M Street, N.W., Washington, D.C., on part of lot 800 (old lot 42) in Square 1186

Present Owner: District of Columbia

Present Occupant: Southern Distributors, Inc.

Present Use: Automotive supply and equipment wholesalers.

Statement of Significance: Built in 1865 on the foundations of the Old Georgetown Market (c. 1796), the Georgetown Market stands on land occupied by earlier structures---a butcher's market and the Georgetown debtor's jail--of the eighteenth century. Although not of extraordinary architectural significance, the Market is perhaps the finest remaining symbol of Georgetown's long history of commercial endeavor.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

(Note: This monograph is deeply indebted to the excellent study by National Park Service historian Dr. George J. Olszewski, A History of the Old Georgetown Market, Georgetown, DC. Paginal references in the following text refer to this unpublished paper, available from U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Division of History Studies. To Dr. Olszewski for the extensive material so cited go the writer's sincere thanks.)

1. Original and subsequent owners: At the time of the decision to construct a market, 1796, the land was owned by Adam King and John Mitchell [p. 1]. In 1802, the land was finally acquired.

Adam King

To

Georgetown Corporation

Deed, dated October 23, 1802; recorded January 5, 1803. [p. 2].

John Mitchell

To

Georgetown Corporation

Deed, dated December 27, 1802; recorded January 5, 1803. [p. 2].

(Note: A stipulation of King's deed was that the site was "for the use of the market aforesaid forever, and for no other use, interest or purpose whatsoever." Mitchell's deed added that the land "was for the use of a public market" [p. 2].)

The property remained under control of the Georgetown Corporation until 1871, when Congress revoked Georgetown's charter. Since that date it has been "administered...by the District of Columbia" [p. 2].

2. Date of erection: The Old Georgetown Market was razed in 1865 [p. 18] and the present structure erected in that year [p. 21].
3. Architect: Not known.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: None known.
5. Notes on alterations and additions: "Ornamented scrolls... [which] formerly decorated the arches of the windows and door" [pp. 19-20] have been removed at unknown date after 1933.

The following building permits were located in the Building Permit Office, District Building, District of Columbia:

1931	June	#144072
1938	November	#217923
1939	February	#220027
1939	February	#220086

6. Important old views: The only known old view is a 1933 sketch by Inez Demonet [p. 20]. See: Olszewski; History of the Old Georgetown Market, Georgetown, D.C., cover illustration.

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: The following excerpt is taken from Olszewski, op. cit., [pp. 13]:

"The Georgetown Market Building stands on part of lot 42 (now 800) in Square 1186 of the original land conveyed by the Maryland Legislature to the newly established town of Georgetown founded in 1751. It antedates all other markets, many of which have since been demolished.

"According to early records, a butcher's market occupied a part of the present market site in Revolutionary times. Later, it was replaced by the Georgetown debtor's jail. When the jail was removed to another site, the first market house of Georgetown was erected thereon in 1795. It was of frame construction. Because of the town's growth, the market existed barely a year.

"On July 1, 1796, the Mayor of Georgetown was authorized to demolish the frame market house and to accept a new market building which was to be constructed on an expanded market site from funds raised by voluntary contributions of citizens of Georgetown. Its construction was begun in 1796, even though negotiations for acquisition of the land by the Georgetown Corporation were not completed until 1803.

"At the time, parts of lot 42, Square 1186, on the north and south sides of the original market site, were owned by Adam King and John Mitchell. On October 23, 1802, a deed was executed by King, and on December 27, 1802, Mitchell followed suit. Both deeds were recorded on January 5, 1803, conveying the land to the Georgetown Corporation.

"During the decades of profitable operation of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, the market was enlarged by "additions". By the end of the Civil War, this market house was in a dilapidated condition. The present market house was built in 1865 and until 1871 was operated as a market by the Georgetown Corporation. From 1871 when Georgetown was incorporated into the District of Columbia, until 1935, it was administered as a market by the District of Columbia.

"It should be noted that a stipulation in King's deed was that the ground was "for the use of the market forever, and for no other use, interest or purpose whatsoever." Mitchell's deed stipulated that the land was "for the use of a public market." These stipulations have caused a great deal of controversy and negotiation during the past twenty years. In 1935 the District Commissioners decided to 'get out of the market business,' but were restrained by these provisions. Having been brought to the attention of Congress, disposition of the Georgetown market property is now the subject of Congressional legislation.

"The final phase of the District's attempt to obviate the restricting covenants of the original deeds was taken on June 1, 1945. It leased the premises to the present tenant, Southern Distributors, Inc., a wholesale automobile supply parts distributor, who is still the leasee, after more than twenty years occupancy of the property for non-market purposes. The District receives \$250 per month rent.

During the past eight years (1957-1965), the District has spent \$2,911.94 on repairs to the premises.

"Originally, this firm carried on its wholesale activities at this site, but in recent years it has transferred its wholesale operations to the Washington suburbs. Its main customers today are the automobile repair shops in Georgetown and it is considered an asset to the business community. It has a 30-day vacate clause in its lease and the premises could be recaptured without trouble." Olszewski, op. cit., [pp. 33-34].

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September 8, 1966

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Georgetown Market is functional in design and essentially non-derivative in character. Long at the hub of commercial activity in the area, recent proposals to return the market to its originally intended use have revealed widespread and positive interest in this building in Georgetown.
2. Condition of fabric: District Commissioner Tobriner, in a letter to the Honorable John L. McMillan, chairman of the House Committee on the District of Columbia, dated February 8, 1966 [Olszewski, op. cit., pp. 35-36] states in part:

"There is evidence of structural failure in various portions of the foundations walls, running from slight cracking to complete collapse. The first floor joists and auxiliary posts...are thoroughly infested with termites. The flooring is badly worn and holed in many places. The brick exterior walls are in need of repairing generally, and require rebuilding in two areas. The wooden roof structure appears to be generally sound, but much leakage of the roof has caused extensive rotting in the trim and eave boards of the roof. The standing seam tin roof is obviously in need of repair or replacement."

Estimated cost of renovation including cleaning up and rat-proofing basement, replacement of existing first floor construction with steel, repairing or replacing doors and/or windows as necessary, cleaning up fabric, installation of public sanitary facilities, refrigeration machinery, heater, boiler and electrical system as well as repair roof, gutter and downspouts is \$166,000 [Olszewski, op. cit., p. 37].

B. Technical Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 40' (three bays) x 200' (eleven bays); one story in height.
2. Foundations: "The basement of the market is constructed of grey field stone, the walls being about four feet in thickness and rising about 15 feet to wooden joists supporting the market floor. The field stone runs the length and breadth of the market with a central arched wall, about 2 feet thick, running down the center. A series of rooms, about 12 feet square, on each side of this central arched wall divide the basement into proportionately spaced storerooms. The alleged 'slave auction block' stands at the center of the east wall..."

"A wooden floor rests on the bare earth of the basement. Supporting wooden joists were also installed in 1943 to support the floor overhead which became weakened over the years." [Olszewski, op. cit., pp. 20-21].
3. Wall construction: Red brick is laid in common bond with headers occurring at intervals of eight courses. Brick pilasters project from wall; supported by foundation stones, they merge into projecting brick "cornice" on sides. Pilasters effectively define bays, within which are round-arched openings.
4. Chimneys: Brick chimneys on east and west sides of roof measure approximately 1' x 1'-4" with one course projection four courses below top. "A steel smoke-stack of undetermined date stands at the south end of the market, rising to a height of about 75 feet." [Olszewski, op. cit., p. 19].
5. Openings: "The M Street facade consisted of an elongated door in the center, about 6 feet wide and 15 feet in height. The windows on either side were of similar width but closed at the base. Ornamented scrollwork, no longer there, formerly decorated the arches of the windows and door..."

"Extending along the faces of the east and west walls were nine windows and doors [later alterations have extended the east and west elevations to eleven bays], similar in structure to those on the M Street facade but arranged in a series of two windows and a door. Each section was recessed about 3 inches and separated from the adjoining window or door by a brick pilaster. These pilasters were about 3 feet in width and rose from the elongated stone at the base of the wall and tied in with the greater wall thickness below the eaves. ...the windows and doors are covered with an iron grill which was installed in 1942. Two arched windows also appear in the south wall, centered by a shack-like entrance to the basement of the market building. Undoubtedly, this entranceway was formerly a door. It would have been most inconvenient to former market tenants if they did not have interior access to their storeroom areas in the basement, particularly during the inclement weather." [Olazewski, op. cit., pp. 19-20].

6. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Very low gable (runs north-south; tin-covered.
- b. Framing: Wood; decking is exposed on (interior) underside.
- c. Cornice, eaves: Elaborate all metal (stamped tin) cornice at north end of Market. Pediments facing east and west are supported by paired brackets at either end. Dentilled and bracketed raking cornices on north front are broken by low central block motif which is capped by flat bracketed and dentilled cornice. Flagpole surmounts block motif.
- d. Dormers: None.

C. Technical Description of Interiors: Although recent use as a warehouse has somewhat altered the original interior plan, the following text, taken from an undated clipping of the Washington Evening Star found in the Washingtoniana Room of the District Central Library throws some light on earlier arrangements:

"...the market contained 22 stalls and that stall income during the year was \$762.50. Stalls rented on the average for \$5 per month. Butchers, fish mongers, and dairy farmers, who occupied stalls in the interior of the market, generally paid a higher rent because their wares required refrigeration.

Their stalls generally stood against the walls of the market. Butter stalls generally stood in the center. Produce was sold at stands on the outside of the market..." [Olszewski, op. cit., p. 23].

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The Georgetown Market faces north onto M Street, N.W. between East Market Street and West Market Street (extensions of Potomac Street) just above the C & O Canal. Its location during the 19th century was excellent, and it was undoubtedly at the center of Georgetown's commercial activity. Disuse of both the canal, and the market (as such), have greatly affected the immediate area: what was once the most vital neighborhood in Georgetown is now perhaps the most unkempt.
2. Enclosures: None.
3. Outbuildings: None.
4. Walks: Fronts on concrete public sidewalk to the north.
5. Landscaping: None.

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